

Helping Children and Youth with Social Anxiety

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Understanding and supporting a child or teen who is anxious isn't easy. Here's how you can help:

Don't play the 'blame game'. Don't blame yourself or your child for the social anxiety problems, it won't help. Instead, focus your energy on trying to make things better. Ask yourself, "What can I do right now to help my child?"

Building social skills, one step at a time

Even though it may be scary for your child or teen, he needs to be with others to learn skills for making and keeping friends.

If at first you don't succeed...keep trying! Children and youth with anxiety usually try to avoid things that challenge and stress them. When your child struggles in some situations:

1. Talk with her about what made it hard
2. Help your child to come up with ideas that might help next time
3. Be sympathetic
4. Give hope by reminding them that there will be more chances in the future to handle things well

Let your child face his fears. It is natural to want to protect children and youth from things that worry them. And it can be hard work helping your child work through these feelings. But avoiding situations that make your child anxious can make things worse, because your child misses chances to pick up the skills they need to make and keep friends.

All feelings are OK. It is natural for parents to want to change their child's feelings when a child is worried or sad. But saying things like, "Don't be sad-there's nothing to be sad about!" tells your child that his feelings are wrong. This can cause your child to keep feelings inside. Encourage your child to tell you how he feels when you have some privacy.

Try not to take over. Because anxious children find it hard to be social, parents sometimes step in and direct things a little too much. This takes away chances for children to learn how to handle their social lives. Help your child to plan and to solve problems by asking questions and gently making suggestions.

Plan activities with other parents and children. But don't do too much at once. Too many people at once or too many group activities could be very stressful for your child.

Challenge your child or teen, but not all at once.

Start with something easy, like watching a movie or playing a video game with another child or teen when you are close by. If this works well, try something that requires more talking, like a board game or cards. Having something 'to do' helps to take some of the pressure off of having to talk. Work up to activities with more children or ones that don't have many rules, like 'pretend' games, or just 'hanging out'.

Want more? Read these: *Freeing Your Child from Anxiety: Powerful, Practical Solutions to Overcome Your Child's Fears, Worries and Phobias* by Tamar E. Chansky, 2004
The Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook: Proven, Step-by-Step Techniques for Overcoming Your Fear (2nd Edition), by Martin Antony, 2008